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AUTHOR Ellsworth, Sharon K.; Demos, George
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ABSTRACT

Research is attempting to examine the causes and effects of incestual child abuse and has discovered more complicated temporary and long-term repercussions than previously suspected. Fifteen subjects in a residential facility participated in a study to examine the self-concept and intellect of girls who had been victims of incest. Their scores on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) were compared to the normative sample for the two instruments. Statistically significant differences were found between the incest group and the normative group on the Tennessee Self Concept subscores for general maladjustment, the Psychosis Scale and the Neurosis Scale. The incest group scored significantly lower on the Full Score and Verbal Scores on the WISC. The findings suggest that treatment of children who have been incest victims should include activities to improve their self-concepts. (Author/JAC)

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A SURVEY OF THE SELF-CONCEPT AND INTELLECT OF GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF INCEST

by

Sharon K. Ellsworth, M.S.
L.D. Teacher,
Garvey School District

&

George Demos, Ph.D.
Professor, CSULB

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LONG BEACH CALIFORNIA 90840
THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGES

INTRODUCTION

Incestual child abuse is an issue that is finally becoming an open topic for public discussion. Professionals in Psychology, Social Welfare, and Academics are giving the topic more of their time and attention. The women's liberation movement has created an arena for such topics as spouse abuse, physical child abuse, and sexual child abuse (Swift, 1977). The effects on and types of treatment for incest victims need further study. The house of Representatives Subcommittee Hearings on Sexual Exploitation of Children (1977) culminated in recommendations that studies are needed dealing with treatment of incest victims.

Research is attempting to answer the questions as to the causes and effects of incest. The data being generated by the increase in incest study show that the aftereffects are devastating. Intrafamily sexual abuse has far more complicated temporary and long-term repercussions than was previously suspected (Roth, 1978). If there was physical brutality the child learns to associate sex with aggression. Some children begin to have fantasies of dying or being caught and rejected by relatives or God (Gentry, 1978). Pre-adolescents and adolescents may act out their fears and concerns through sexually aggressive behavior, dressing seductively, delinquency, hostility towards others, sexual

promiscuity, prostitution, truancy, running away, substance abuse, and increased fearfulness. They may also have feelings of worthlessness, self-hatred, and a sense of being damaged or dirty (Slager-Jorne, 1978).

In a study by Myerhoff (1963) of delinquent girls who had experienced incest, and of their mothers, it was found that not only did the girls have a low self-concept but their mothers also had a low self-concept.

Kathleen James (1977) used a group treatment model with seven girls, in a juvenile institution, who had experienced incest. They shared behaviors such as runaway, low tolerance to self-disclosure, deprecating statements about themselves, and use of sexually provocative behavior around males. The subjects were given a pre- and post-self-esteem inventory of James' making. The test results confirmed that they did feel more comfortable about themselves after discussing the incest experience with others who had experienced incest.

Findings reported by Kaufman, Peck, and Tagiuri (1954) indicate that the girls they studied scored below the norms on the Verbal Scores on the WISC, but that their Performance Scores were generally higher than their Verbal Scores.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It was the purpose of this study to examine the self-concept and the intellect of girls who have been

victims of incest and to compare their scores with the respective norms of the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (TSCS) and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC). The following questions were developed:

First question--To what extent would girls who have been victims of incest have lower self-concept scores, as measured by the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965) than those scores reported for the normative sample on this instrument?

Second question--To what extent would girls who have been victims of incest have lower measures of intellectual ability, as measured by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (Wechsler, 1974) than those reported for the normative sample on this instrument?

This study was limited to a select sample of children who had been removed from their home. It nevertheless includes a representative cross section in terms of ethnic, economic, and educational considerations.

It was not possible to obtain TSCS scores for five of the subjects and three of the WISC scores were not available.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects: The subjects in this study were residents of a placement facility for children who for various reasons have no home. They are placed by the Department of Adoptions, Department of Public Social Service, and the Probation Department. The residents at the time of this study included

boys who were nine years old and younger and girls ranging in age from 10 to 19. The reasons for their placement varied from need for adoption, lack of suitable foster home, parental neglect or abuse, and/or minor acting-out problems. The 15 subjects in this study were all current residents and comprised the total number of documented incest victims that were part of the current total population of 90. The ages of the subjects ranged from five to 15. The mean age for the subjects at time of placement was 11.3.

Procedure: The TSCS was given as a group test by the author and uniform procedure was used. The WISC was administered individually to each subject by the resident psychologist and the scores for each subject were then taken from the files.

Instruments: The Tennessee Self Concept Scale is a list of one hundred items believed to represent a sampling of the various conceptual aspects of self. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children is an instrument designed to measure a person's intellectual ability.

Method of Data Analysis: The data analysis procedure for the first research question consisted of a one-tail *t* test for independent means to determine whether a significant difference existed between (a) the mean scores on the five subscales, and (b) the reported respective mean scores for the norm sample on

this instrument. For the second research question, a one-tail t test for independent means was used to determine whether a significant difference existed between (a) the mean scores on the Performance, Verbal, and Full Scores of the WISC for the sample and (b) the reported respective mean scores for the sample on this instrument.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Research Question 1--TSCS: Defensive Positive Scale: The mean score on the Defensive Positive Scale of the TSCS for this sample was not significantly different ($p > .05$) from that of the normative sample. General Maladjustment Scale: The mean score here was significantly lower ($p < .01$) than the normative group. This is an inverse scale, and interpretation of data analysis should take this factor into account. Psychosis Scale: The mean score for the sample was significantly higher ($p < .01$) than that for the normative group. Personality Disorder Scale: The mean score for this sample was significantly lower ($p < .01$) than that for the normative sample. Neurosis Scale: This is an inverse scale, and interpretation of the findings must take this into account. The mean score for this sample was significantly lower ($p < .05$) than the normative group. These findings seem to corroborate those of DeFrancis (1969), Slager-Jorne(1978), and James(1977), all of which reported that girls who have been victims of

incest tend to have poor self-concepts. So far as the lack of definitive findings for the Defensive Positive Scale is concerned, it should be noted that Fitts (1965) has suggested that some individuals with emotional difficulties do not see themselves in a negative way. Thus, it is not necessarily surprising that no differences were found in mean scores on this scale. Finally, the interpretation of the findings with respect to the Psychosis scale must be tempered by the fact that one subject in this study scored extremely high on this scale. With such a small sample an extremely high score may have unduly affected the overall average for all subjects on this scale.

Research Question 2--WISC: Verbal Score: The mean score for the subjects in this study was significantly lower ($p < .01$) than the mean score for the normative group. Performance Score: No significant difference ($p > .05$) was found between the mean score of the subjects in this study and that of the subjects in the normative group. Full Score: The mean score was significantly lower ($p < .01$) than that for the normative group. The findings of this study indicate that for the Verbal and Full Scores the subjects scored lower on the average than did the subjects in the normative group. For the Performance Score, however, the evidence did not support the second research question. It is highly likely that the results for the Full Score were influenced by those

for the Verbal Score. These findings confirm those reported by Kaufman, Peck, and Tagiuri (1954), who indicated that several girls who were victims of father-daughter incest scored below the norms on Verbal Performance on the WISC, but that their Performance Scores were generally higher than their Verbal Scores.

SUMMARY

Based upon the results of this investigation it would appear reasonable and appropriate in treating children who have been incest victims to provide activities that would improve their self-concepts. Additionally it would be advantageous to include a process for increasing communication skills as these children appear to be deficient in this area. Testing at various intervals would provide insight into the condition of the victimized individual and his/her growth during therapy. Longitudinal studies are needed to identify the impact of incest on children and their adjustment into adult life. If these child victims are to receive appropriate treatment then further studies are desperately needed.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Test Comparison of the Tennessee Self Concept Scale Standardization Group and the Ellsworth Study: Defensive Positive

	Defensive Positive			
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t Test Comparison
Ellsworth	10	60.90	12.49	t=1.63[a]
Tennessee	625	54.40	12.38	

[a]No significant difference

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Test Comparison of the Tennessee Self Concept Scale Standardization Group and the Ellsworth Study: General Maladjustment

	General Maladjustment			
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t Test Comparison
Ellsworth	10	83.70	8.31	t=5.70**
Tennessee	625	98.80	9.15	

**Significant beyond .01 level

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Test Comparison of the Tennessee Self Concept Scale Standardization Group and the Ellsworth Study: Psychosis

		Psychosis		
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t Test Comparison
Ellsworth	10	60.60	11.60	$t = 3.95^{**}$
Tennessee	625	46.10	6.49	

**Significant beyond .01 level

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Test Comparison of the Tennessee Self Concept Scale Standardization Group and the Ellsworth Study: Personality Disorder

		Personality Disorder		
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t Test Comparison
Ellsworth	10	62.70	14.67	$t = 2.94^{**}$
Tennessee	625	76.39	11.72	

**Significant beyond .01 level

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Test Comparison of the Tennessee Self Concept Scale Standardization Group and the Ellsworth Study: Neurosis

	Neurosis			
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t Test Comparison
Ellsworth	10	77.20	9.77	t = 2.28*
Tennessee	625	84.31	11.10	

*Significant beyond .05 level

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Test Comparison of the Wechsler Standardization Group for 11.5-Year-Olds and the Ellsworth Study: Verbal Score

	Verbal Score			
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t Test Comparison
Ellsworth	12	91.9	17.3	t = 7.57**
Wechsler	1999	100.0	15.0	

**Significant beyond .01 level

Table 7

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Test Comparison of the Wechsler Standardization Group for 11.5-Year-Olds and the Ellsworth Study: Performance Score

	Performance Score			
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t Test Comparison
Ellsworth	12	99.3	16.2	t = 1.50[a]
Wechsler	1999	100.0	15.0	

[a]No significant difference

Table 8

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Test Comparison of the Wechsler Standardization Group for 11.5-Year-Olds and the Ellsworth Study: Full Score

	Full Score			
Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t Test Comparison
Ellsworth	12	95.0	17.7	t = 4.10**
Wechsler	1999	100.0	15.0	

**Significant beyond .01 level